



## Ethical Issues of Guerilla Marketing

### KEYWORDS

Guerrilla marketing, ethical issues, features

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**ABSTRACT** *Guerrilla Marketing is an advertising strategy that focuses on low-cost unconventional marketing tactics that yield maximum results. The term guerrilla marketing was inspired by guerrilla warfare which is a form of irregular warfare and relates to the small tactic strategies used by armed civilians. Much like guerrilla warfare, guerrilla marketing uses the same sort of tactics in the marketing industry. This alternative advertising style relies heavily on unconventional marketing strategy, high energy and imagination. Because of the lack of resources, small business must use a different set of marketing strategies and tactics than big business. Guerrilla marketing involves unusual approaches such as intercept encounters in public places, street giveaways of products, PR stunts, or any unconventional marketing intended to get maximum results from minimal resources. More innovative approaches to Guerrilla marketing now utilize mobile digital technologies to engage the consumer and create a memorable brand experience. Guerrilla marketing is a low cost strategy which makes ideal for firms who do not have massive marketing budgets. So many small firms can select other media and work with low marketing budget. Guerrilla marketing is desirable only if the content is proper and acceptable. Its success will also depend on its social acceptance and mature scripts rather than vulgar ideas.*

### Introduction

Guerrilla Marketing is an advertising strategy that focuses on low-cost unconventional marketing tactics that yield maximum results. The original term was coined by Jay Conrad Levinson in his 1984 book 'Guerrilla Advertising'. The term guerrilla marketing was inspired by guerrilla warfare which is a form of irregular warfare and relates to the small tactic strategies used by armed civilians. Many of these tactics includes ambushes, sabotage, raids and elements of surprise. Much like guerrilla warfare, guerrilla marketing uses the same sort of tactics in the marketing industry.

This alternative advertising style relies heavily on unconventional marketing strategy, high energy and imagination. Guerrilla marketing is about taking the consumer by surprise, make an indelible impression and create copious amounts of social buzz.

Guerrilla marketing is often ideal for small businesses that need to reach a large audience without breaking the bank. It also is used by big companies in grassroots campaigns to compliment on-going mass media campaigns. Individuals have also adopted this marketing style as a way to find a job or more work.

### The History of guerilla Marketing

Advertising can be dated back to 4000 BC where the early Egyptians used papyrus to make sales messages and wall posters. What we consider traditional advertising and marketing slowly developed over the centuries but never really boomed until the early 1900s.

It was at this time that the main goal of advertisements was to educate the consumer on the product or service rather than to entertain and engage them. In 1960, campaigns focuses on heavy advertising spending in different mass media channels such as radio and print.

Agencies struggled to make an impression on consumers and consumers were tired of being marketed to. It was time for a change. In 1984, marketer Jay Conrad Levinson introduced the formal term in his book called, "Guerrilla Marketing." Levinson comes from a background as the Senior

Vice-President at J. Walter Thompson and Creative Director and Board Member at Leo Burnett Advertising. In Levinson's book, he proposes unique ways of approaching and combating traditional forms of advertising. The goal of guerrilla marketing was to use unconventional tactics to advertise on a small budget. During this time, radio, television and print were on the rise, but consumers were growing tired.

Larger companies have been using unconventional marketing to compliment their advertising campaigns. Some marketers argue that when big businesses utilize guerrilla marketing tactics, it isn't true guerrilla. Bigger companies have much larger budgets and their brands are usually already well established.

Guerrilla marketing is an advertising strategy, in which low-cost unconventional means (sticker bombing, flash mobs) are utilized in a large network of individual cells, to convey or promote a product or an idea. The term guerrilla marketing is easily traced to guerrilla warfare which utilizes a typical tactics to achieve a goal in a competitive and unforgiving environment.

### Need for guerilla marketing

The objective of guerrilla marketing is to create a unique, engaging and thought-provoking concept to generate buzz, and consequently turn viral. Guerrilla marketing involves unusual approaches such as intercept encounters in public places, street giveaways of products, PR stunts, or any unconventional marketing intended to get maximum results from minimal resources. More innovative approaches to Guerrilla marketing now utilize mobile digital technologies to engage the consumer and create a memorable brand experience.

Guerrilla marketing has been proven in action to work for small businesses around the world. It works because it's simple to understand, easy to implement and outrageously inexpensive. The need for guerrilla marketing can be seen in the light of three facts:

1. Because of big business downsizing, decentralization, relaxation of government regulations, affordable technology, and a revolution in consciousness, people around

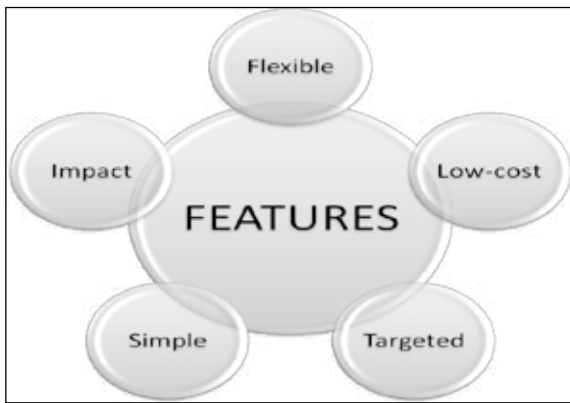
the world are gravitating to small business in record numbers.

2. Small business failures are also establishing record numbers and one of the main reasons for the failures is a failure to understand marketing.
3. Guerrilla marketing has been proven in action to work for small businesses around the world. It works because it's simple to understand, easy to implement and outrageously inexpensive.

**Features**

Flexible – Among other marketing strategies, this strategy is more flexible. This strategy is unconventional so it can overcome the barriers created by the traditional marketing communications. It is relatively easy to respond to change when such an exercise is adopted by the company.

Low Cost – Guerrilla marketing is a low cost strategy which makes ideal for firms who do not have massive marketing budgets. Celebrities are very costly and so are the TV ad rates. So many small firms can select other media and work with low marketing budget.



**Fig: 1 Figure showing features of guerilla marketing**

Targeted – The message can be designed to reach the target market which reduces waste and ineffectiveness. The product or brand breaks the clutter and stands right in front of the target audience.

Simple – Strategies are simple and easy to use and implement which is ideal for the smaller business or new ventures. Many communications are very effective when they are made in simple for rather than complicated one.

Impact – There is a higher brand recall and better positioning as it is targeted to the audience. The impact of such strategies can directly be seen in sales and profits of the company.

**Ethical issues**

- 1) Content and intent: Guerrilla marketing is desirable only if the content is proper and acceptable. Many times the content may invite moral policing if there are images of bloodshed or war times. The target should receive the message with same objective. If there are any lapses in interpretation, then the effectiveness of ad is diminished.
- 2) False and Misleading Advertisements: Then there is the issue of false and downright disingenuous advertisements. While in itself this is an important ethical issue, an extension of this is the question of credibility. Nowadays, newspaper columns are rife with advertisements which blatantly compare features of brands with those of their competitors. Citing the opinion of 'experts', these advertisements claim their brands to be quantitatively and qualitatively better than those of their rivals. In India a leading car manufacturer had to recall its ad campaign when it incorrectly stated that one of its car models was superior to that of its competitor's.

- 3) Information misuse: Many marketers are found misusing the information. The ads may deliver something which is not true and not disclose correct facts. In this case the audience is forced to take a wrong decision. The information source is also a major concern in such types of advertisements.



**Fig: 2 Figure showing ethical issues of guerilla marketing**

- 4) Brutal: Many images or actions are brutal or deadly which is not good for the society. Situations like car or bike driven at a high speed or many people dead on road after accidents are all quite brutal content to be displayed to general audience.
- 5) Negative emotions: Marketers use negative emotions like fear and anger to provoke people to purchase their product. The use of fear appeals may lead to a murky communication if used for a prolonged period. Use of negative emotions should be negligible and should be used only if highly necessary.
- 6) Distraction: It has been found that ad placements under these strategies are quite unusual. Marketers select places where people do not expect to see an ad, such places like inside wash rooms, under the bridges, hangings from the ceiling, paints on the public wall or stunts at public places. Many of such incidents may cause distraction and lead to accidents.
- 7) Exposure to children: There are no ad filters so; even children are exposed to some ads which might not be suitable for them. Ads of deodorants like Axe, wild stone, etc are aired during prime time when even children are watching the TV. The content of all these ads are not suitable for children.
- 8) Acceptance in society: Many issues like live-in relationships or one night stands are not acceptable in society. So if the ads are targeting to such issues, than social acceptance will not be there. Many ads also highlight the racial or colour discrimination in their ads to attract attention, but over a period of time, social acceptance will not be there.
- 9) Surrogate Advertisements: In India, alcohol and cigarette advertisements were banned outright some years back. However, alcohol and cigarette companies alike are using the avenue of surrogate advertisements to press forward their case. For the viewer though, the 'subtle' pointer towards the real deal is enough as the surrogate advertisements leave no ambiguity in their minds.
- 10) Unhealthy Competition: Many companies will try to adapt this as their marketing strategy but it may lead to unhealthy competition as this is a low cost strategy. If all the marketers show the content not acceptable to all, then it will lead to unhealthy competition in the market.

**Conclusion**

The goal of guerilla ad is to increase customer awareness and interest through the product and its associated brand. Acceptability of a guerilla ad is related to its ends rather than its means. Although there are successful examples of guerilla marketing strategies, some of guerilla advertising imple-

mentations that are prepared and executed without certain boundaries may lead to ethical problems. Those ads, which include fear-appeal, irritate the prospects and distract attention, may be problematic in ethical terms. Public dislike of an ad may lead to the erosion of the goodwill and may reduce the short-term and particularly, the long term effectiveness of that advertisement. At the same time, dislike of a company's

ad may have negative effects on future advertisements. Firms should continue to search for creative ways to connect with their customers, but they have to implement these new strategies in a more responsible manner because the ethicality of guerilla ad is measured by its consequences. It would be more effective if company have their own moral policing and unique ideas to present to the market.

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